

*“The Honorable Harvest”*

*Based on Matthew 25:31-46. The Feast at the End of Time*

Whether we have known it or not, you and I here at SPC have been building up to this particular liturgical moment for the entire month of November and even, truth be told for the entire year. Today we celebrate a mythological vision of an honorable harvest at the end of time when all has finally been made well and we can feast at the table in a Reign of Love forever and ever amen.

This mythological vision made real is what the Matthew 25 Initiative of the national church is all about, with themes we have been exploring all month: vulnerability and reciprocity, congregational vitality and deconstructing unjust reality. Today we conclude with a call to climate action, which is really, in the end, a call to re-cultivate the connection of our human body-minds to the creation from which we have come: *earth our body, water our blood, air our breath, and fire our spirit.*

Whatever we do to the earth, we remember today, we do to the body of humanity. Whatever we do to the water, we remember today, we do to the blood of humanity. Whatever we do to the air we do to the breath of humanity. Whatever we do to the fire we do to the spirit of humanity. There is a reciprocity here, a symbiosis, an insistence that we who are human are *part of* the balance of creation.

In the church, we who are concerned with climate justice will often describe our role in creation as *stewardship*. Our job is to cultivate responsibly the earth entrusted to our care. But from the perspective of creation, even that is not quite right. The concept of stewardship still assumes humans are over and against the rest of creation, the pinnacle somehow, as if we are the only ones responsible for caring for everything else, instead of active participants in a creation that sustains a *collective* culture of care through which we who are human are called to learn how to *receive* that care at least as much as we are called to learn how to give it.

On this Reign of Love Sunday we are compelled to confess that Creation *is* us and we *are* it, not above it or beyond it or in charge of it. This is what the indigenous practice of Honorable Harvest is trying to teach us. Our more than human family is indeed, exactly that: family. Plants and animals are our *kin*, with all of the familial joys and responsibilities - and challenges - that come with that designation. We share with our kin, we laugh with our kin, we cry with our kin, we struggle with our kin, we learn with and from our kin. We ask permission from our kin, we minimize harm with our kin - even when sometimes we are angry with our kin - we do not steal from our kin, we are grateful for our kin. When our kin hurts, we hurt with them, when our kin thrives, we celebrate their success. When our kin ain't happy, ain't nobody happy. When our kin live well, we all live well.

On this Reign of Love Sunday, we feast with gratitude for the gift of our kin, for the care our kin have offered us throughout the harvest, for the care our kin will continue to offer us, even as the earth from which we all come now turns toward a time of deep rest and rejuvenation.

Indeed, something primal is happening for our kin and for us in this liturgical moment that marks the mythological end of time with its reign of love forever and ever. The author and poet, Gayle Boss, in her illustrated Advent meditations titled *All Creation Waits* reminds us that, even as detached as we moderns are from the earth-bound rhythms of food production, our human body-minds here in the northern hemisphere remain attuned to the joyful plenty of harvest in its culmination at the exact same moment the sun retreats too far south to keep the crops alive.

Even as we feast, the dark end of the year brings unrest. It is, after all, the *end*. The shadow of fear falls: will this be the year the food runs out? Will this be the year the light refuses to return? Will this be the year our church pledge drive peters out?

Feasting and fasting, lightness and darkness, plenty and want, giving and holding back, it seems we paradoxically cannot have the one without the other. The truth of this paradox is embedded in our very bones. The truth of this paradox is embedded in the practice of the sheep and the goats described in Matthew 25. The sheep are joyful, celebratory, giving, transcending, happy, joyous and free. The goats are hoarding and constricting, fearful to be sure, or perhaps just plain greedy. Which is not to say that literal sheep are bad and literal goats are good. It's just to put some literal skin on the paradox embedded within us all.

We all experience, to some degree, the hoarding and constricting, fear mixed with greed of the goats in Matthew 25, spiraling out of control now in our climate crisis. As well, we all have within us the capacity for collective care, the generosity and reciprocity of the Honorable Harvest as a sheep-inspired antidote.

The call of Jesus in our parable, I believe, is not to condemn those parts of ourselves that hoard and constrict out of fear and greed, but simply to acknowledge they exist and can cause great harm when allowed to run amok. Likewise, no single one of us functions solely and completely in the trust that all will be well, even if we mostly get it right. Pretending we do when we really do not can also cause great harm in the absence of honest self-reflection.

Our parable invites us to cultivate our capacity for collective care through the spiritual practices that keep us grounded in the wisdom of creation: communion as a ready-made witness of Honorable Harvest; Advent as a discipline of contemplative darkness and the rest that is required for all of creation; the Prayer of Jesus, with its promise of provision, one day at a time, one meal at a time.

At the end of time, our parable tells us, God can sort through those parts of ourselves we really do not like. In the meantime, we do our part, in the best way we know how to sustain the Creation that sustains us, so that God's reign of love will last forever. On this day, at least, we live as if we already have.